




TRAVEL + LUXURY

Ace in the Pack

A group of seven people are posed in the lobby bar of the Ace Hotel Sydney. In the foreground, a man with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a black t-shirt with a 'ROCK CITY' graphic, is reclining on a brown leather sofa. Behind him, another man with a beard and a blue jacket sits on the same sofa. To the left, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a pink jacket and white pants with red heart patterns, sits on the edge of the bar. To the right, a man with curly hair and a beard, wearing a dark green jacket and light-colored pants, sits on the edge of the bar. In the background, a man with a beard and a blue jacket sits on a step. A woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a black t-shirt with a 'ROCK CITY' graphic, is reclining on a brown leather sofa. The bar is well-stocked with various bottles of alcohol. A large, glowing, pumpkin-shaped pendant light hangs from the ceiling. The walls are made of dark wood and concrete, and there are some plants and art pieces in the background.

THESE PAGES, FROM LEFT artists James Lemon, Joanna Lamb, Julia Gutman (on floor), Nadia Fernandez (at centre front), Karen Black (on step), Nell (towards bar), Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran (standing on bar), Michael Lindeman (seated at centre), Sanné Mestrom, Jason Phu (towards front), Glenn Barkley and designer David Flack in the lobby bar of the Ace Hotel Sydney.

By Jake Millar
Photographed by Anson Smart

Hotel art often gets a bad rap — and with good reason. But as Ace Hotel Sydney opens its doors, it's clear the design team at Flack Studio has created a cutting-edge, art-filled oasis like no other.



Back in 1999, when the Ace Hotel opened its first location in Seattle, Washington, among the artworks on display in the converted halfway house was a series of paintings by an emerging artist who turned out to be an inspired choice. His name was Brian Donnelly, better known as KAWS, and he would go on to become one of the world's most successful contemporary artists, his cartoonish, celeb-friendly pieces regularly fetching millions of dollars at auction.

"The art was nearly worth as much as the hotel, in the end, because he turned into such a success," says Atelier Ace CEO Brad Wilson with a laugh. "But I think in a lot of ways, the partners have always had great appreciation for art and an understanding of up-and-coming and emerging artists."

Soon, Australians will get to experience this first hand. As you might have heard, the boutique hotel chain is finally coming Down Under, with the Ace Hotel Sydney opening this month in Surry Hills. And art plays a major role in its design.

"We want our hotels to be places that are really connected to their location and their community," says Wilson. "Art has a really wonderful way of doing that, and that connection is a critical link into the mindset of a city." To achieve this art-filled vision, Wilson and his team tapped the creative talents of Flack Studio, whose

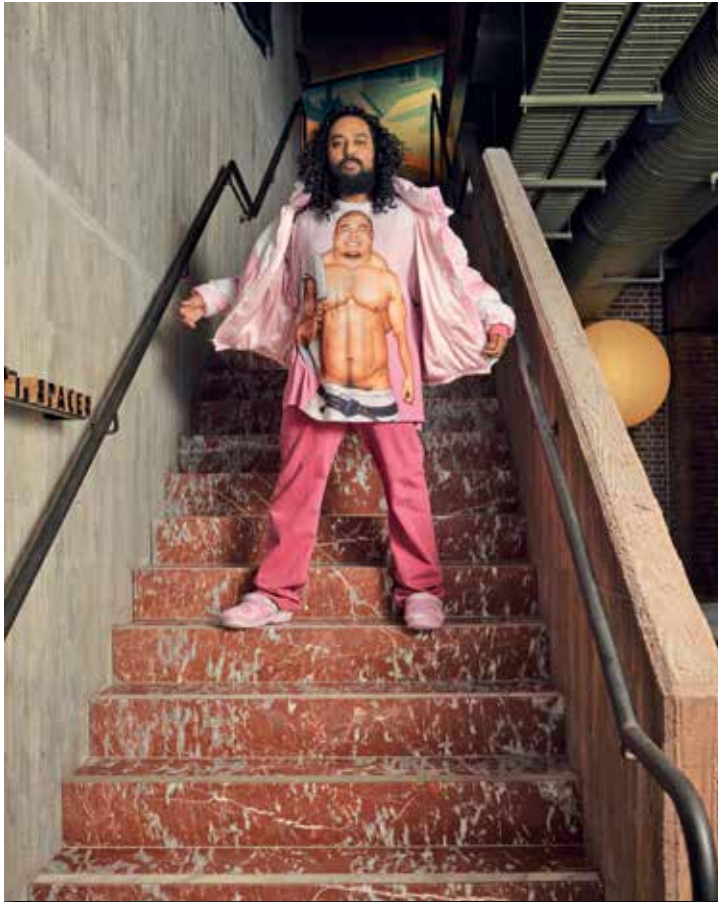
founder and principal, David Flack, has long had an appreciation for art in his projects. "Hotel art is often like black-and-white pictures of landmarks," says Wilson. "Too often people think that localising is about [creating] a stereotypical image of a city. And we don't want anything to do with that. We don't want to go to Sydney and use kangaroos. We want to do something that's really authentic to what's happening in the city today and I think David and Mark [Robinson, Flack Studio principal] have a very keen understanding of Australia and what's happening, which has really brought to the overall curation of the art a really unique collection."

Some of the local names you'll find in Ace Hotel Sydney include Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran, Tony Albert, Julia Gutman, Karen Black, Glenn Barkley and James Lemon. Each has contributed pieces that go well beyond decoration, helping to define not just the hotel's distinct aesthetic, but its character.

"The curation of art was developed over the duration of the project — across about four years — and rather than being one of the last things we did, it really helped inform the spaces," explains Flack. "We wanted to create conversation in each space and show a cross-representation of cultures and mediums across the hotel, which is what Australia is. We thought about Ace Hotel Sydney as a share house and all of the personalities who would live here." »



THIS PAGE Nadia Hernández with her work, *Protected, they call us (tender, scraped, semi blended)* (2021). “My artwork for holds a multitude of meanings, one part blessing another part recipe, it captures my familial connection through daily exchanges and conversations. A way to be together whilst being physically apart,” says Hernández. **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT** artist Nell in the lobby lounge with works by Peter Cooley, James Lemon, Sanné Maestrom, Glenn Barkley and Nabilah Nordin. Artist Scott Duncan in the lobby lounge at Ace Hotel Sydney.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT artist Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran. Artist Sanné Mestrom. Artist James Lemon with his concierge desk. Artist Karen Black.





THIS PAGE *Mid Century Modern* (2017) series by Tony Albert.
“Collaboration brings up questions that we worked through:
Do we create two bodies of work or one, separately or
together?” says Albert of his contribution to Ace Hotel Sydney.
“We resolved this by making a collective body of work in which
individual artists’ styles, ideas and voices still came through.”



“The work is made from terracotta and covered in a dense array of images – some cut and shaped, others from moulds – shells, coins, plaques, faces, stamps and a reference to kiln shards found on site”

GLENN BARKLEY

THIS PAGE Glenn Barkley with his work, *Wall Vase for Johnathon Leak*. “It is the largest work I have made in this way and the process of making it has opened new ideas and potential for future work,” he says.



THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT *Becoming With 6* (2019) artwork by Jahanne Pasco-White in the lobby bar of Ace Hotel Sydney. Artist Jason Phu in a guestroom-level hallway with his work.



« This sharehouse atmosphere is also reflected in the hotel's communal areas, such as the main lobby — complete with sunken lounge — as well as the ground-floor bar and cafe, which spills out onto the laneway behind the building, catering to everyone from hotel guests to locals on their morning coffee run.

“All of our hotels are community hubs. That is what we do,” says Wilson. “For us, that’s as important as anything else because it is the real connection to the city. Our public areas are really designed around the idea that this is a gathering place.”

“At the heart of the design is communicating a sense of place and creating spaces that can be embraced by the community, both locals and guests,” echoes Flack. “The space has to feel welcoming, inviting and effortless, rather than trying too hard.”

For client Atelier Ace, which Wilson describes as a “collection of modernists”, Flack was an obvious choice, a fact reflected by the unique modernist look and feel he has brought to the building and each of its 264 rooms, which span the historic Tyne House brick factory below and a new construction on the upper levels with a rooftop restaurant and bar, Kiln, set to open shortly.

“I love the mix of rooms throughout the building,” says Flack. “We really needed to approach the space empathetically and

honour the heritage of the building, which really empowers the design. Each time you stay, there really is something different to see. It feels cohesive and as we’ve watched it all come together, there is a strong lineage of Australian design through the project.”

If the Seattle example is anything to go by, it’s worth taking note of the artists Flack and his team have handpicked for Ace Hotel Sydney. Our advice? Snap up their work while you still can.

“It’s interesting that some of the artists that we started with as emerging artists, after three or four years, these people have really gotten their own identity over that time and are now established,” says Wilson. “So it’s been a fun project in that respect.” Despite all the difficulties of the past few years, Flack is just excited for people to finally get the chance to enjoy Australia’s first Ace Hotel.

“It was a dream project from the outset,” he says. “We wanted to create something that represented Surry Hills, Ace and Australia. We’ve been hands-on on every nut and bolt of the project, and have designed custom lighting, furniture, textiles and materiality throughout. An army of collaborators and consultants who we highly respect have been involved from the beginning and we could not have done this without them. It really is the proudest moment of my career.” **CM/VL** acehotel.com/sydney flackstudio.com.au



THIS PAGE Julia Gutman with her work, *Once More, with Feeling* (2021/2022). "It's a love letter to my friends, made almost entirely out of clothing, sheets and blankets they have worn and grown in," says Gutman. "This piece is the largest work I've made so far. It's surreal to share something so intimate at such a monumental scale, particularly alongside the work of so many artists I admire."

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Joanna Lamb with her work in the staircase landing: "It felt like the perfect fit, painting a pool reflection designed specifically for Ace Hotel Sydney. The idea of the reflection is about momentariness — enjoy it, take delight in it while it lasts." Atelier Ace CEO Brad Wilson in the lobby lounge. *Cleromancy* (2021) artwork by Justene Williams in the staircase landing.

